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Clipping, April 1, 1966

Washington Star — April 1, 1966 Speaking With Signs

SIR: Many deaf people have found the American sign language practical and pleasant for communication among themselves. For some reason, however, certain philanthropists and educators are upset by the very idea of using sign language at all.

Mrs. Lillian Grosvenor Jones says in an interview in the Society section of The Star March 23: "Nobody should use sign language any more. They all should be able to talk, even the mute."

One should probably not question the humanitarian intent behind this sweeping statement. One should, however, examine the logic. Mrs. Jones is saying, in effect, that "talking" and "using sign language" are two totally antagonistic and mutually exclusive practices. The reasoning fails to consider the real problem of the deaf man, which is that he cannot hear. When he does use sign language, it is because he cannot hear, not because he cannot talk (he can, for the most part.)

Mrs. Jones, in a spirit of misguided humanitarianism, reproaches him. A rather large segment of the people of America do likewise. They have been taken in by the vicious "logic" of the anti-sign language people. If you want to be "normal," these zealots say, you must talk. The deaf man says, "All I want is to be able to communicate as clearly and easily as possible, particularly with my friends."

Carl Croneberg.

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